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## Since when did you enslave the people

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Islam on its very advent denounced and fought against human bondage in all its forms and manifestations. It took practical steps and measures to minimize and abolish this scourge from the face of the earth. It taught humanity the lesson of freedom. Let us recall the historic statement of Hazrat Umar, the second Caliph after the Prophet Mohammed.

Ibn Abd Al-Hakim reported: Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, said that a man from the people of Egypt came to Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and said, 'O leader of the believers, I seek refuge in you from injustice!' Umar replied, 'You have sought someone willing'. The man said, 'I competed with the son of Amr ibn Al-Aas and I won, but he started striking me with a whip and saying: I am the son of the dignified!'

Upon this, Umar wrote to Amr ordering him to travel to him with his son. He came with his son and Umar said, 'Where is the Egyptian?' He gave him the whip and told him to strike the son of Amr. The man started striking him while Umar was saying, 'Strike the son of the illiterates!' Anas said, 'By Allah, the man struck him and we loved his striking, and he did not stop, until we wished he stopped'. Then Umar said to the Egyptian, 'Direct it to Amr'. The Egyptian said, 'O leader of the believers, it was only his son who struck me and I have settled the score'. Umar said to Amr:

'Since when did you enslave the people, though they were born from their mothers in freedom'?

Amr said, 'O leader of the believers, I did not know about this and he did not tell me'.

This is a more meaningful and comprehensive statement than that of the great philosopher and political thinker Jean-Jaques Rousseau who in the opening lines of his monumental treatise, 'Social Contract' published (AD 1762) said:

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‘Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer.’

Rousseau simply stated the fact, whereas Umar denounced slavery and declared freedom for all, twelve hundred years before Rousseau. The denouncement of slavery was a crusade not only against physical slavery but a Jihad (utmost struggle) against all forms and manifestations of slavery. In this incident, boasting of being a ‘son of the dignified’ is considered a form of enslavement.

This doctrine was poetically stated by the envoy of Sa’ad Ibn Waqas, (commander-in-chief of the Muslim army in the historical Battle of Qadisiyyah when the Persian empire collapsed) in the court of the Persian General before the Battle of Qadisiyyah, which was fought in 636 AD between the Arab Muslim army and the Sassanid Persian. Rustam, the commander of the Persian army, sent a message to the Muslim commander, Saad bin Waqqas, asking him to send an emissary for talks. Saad deputed Rabi bin Amir as the envoy.

Rabi appeared before Rustam wearing a coat of shining mail over which was wrapped a coarse woolen cloak. Around his head was a veil held by thongs of a camel’s girth. His sword hung at his side in a sheath of coarse cloth. In his right hand he carried his spear. Rabi mounted on a shaggy horse arrived at the edge of the carpet at which Rustam and his couriers were seated. The Persians wanted Rabi to lay aside his arms. Rabi said, “I have not come to you to lay down my weapons. You invited me, and I have come, if you do not wish me to come the way I like, I shall return.” Rustam asked his men to let the Muslim come the way he wished. When Rustam, asked, why had they come to Persia? Rabi said:

‘Allah has sent us to deliver you from worshiping the creation to worshiping the Creator of the creation and to deliver you from the constriction of this world to the vastness of this world and the after life and from the oppression of the religions to the justice of Islam (Ibn Kathir).

Complete submission and surrender to Allah protects humanity from all forms of slavery. Iqbal beautifully expressed this idea in the following couplet:

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یہ ایک سجدہ جسے تو گراں سمجھتا ہے

ہزار سجدے سے دیتا ہے آدمی کو نجات!

(This one simple prostration which you consider heavy on you, rids humankind of thousand prostrations)

The process and institution of human bondage and enslavement has a far-reaching impact on society. It is against human dignity and honour. In slavery, the circle of human activity shrinks, in freedom it expands: man can utilize his capabilities to the fullest and his creative faculties come into play. How beautifully Iqbal has expressed this idea in this couplet:

بندگی میں گھٹ کے رہ جاتی ہے اک جوئے کم آب

اور آزادی میں بحر بیکراں ہے زندگی

(The rivulet of life dries up in slavery and in freedom; is a shore-less ocean)

The Muslim emperors and kings increasingly started disregarding human dignity and honour. They began enslaving their own subjects physically and intellectually. The slave trade began and the number of concubines in the haram increased. The ulama (Muslim scholars) discussed the issue of slaves, both male and female, in their books of Fiqh (Islamic Law), where they justified the captivity of all slaves, even though this was contrary to the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. The clear teachings of Islam regarding freedom and respect for human dignity were ignored and dumped into oblivion. Whoever raised his voice against this repression and injustice was put behind bars or killed.

Imam Husayn (RA), Zaid Nafs-i-Zakia (who led the Alid Revolt (762 – 763 AD) in Medina, a failed rebellion, against the second Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mansur and was martyred on December 6th, 762 AD), Imam Abu Hanifa (Nu'maan ibn Thabit, 699 –767 AD, one of the most important Islamic scholars, jurist and the founder of the Hanafi school of Fiqh) Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, 780-855 AD, was an important Muslim scholar and theologian who is considered the founder of the Hanbali school of Fiqh, Imam Sarakhsi (who died sometime around 1096 AD, was imprisoned due to his

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opinion on a juristic matter concerning a ruler; he criticized a King by questioning the validity of his marriage to a slave woman. He spent around fifteen years in prison. While he was imprisoned he wrote the Al-Mabsut, the 30 volumes book on Hanafi Fiqh) and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi, commonly known as Mujadid Alif Sani suffered for freedom of expression and speaking truth, a truth that was unpalatable and inconvenient for the rulers of the day.

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